

at his belt. This dagger was so thickly studded with jewels that sparks flew from it. Arrayed in this fashion, he would have been easily taken by any one for a scion of some great house rather than a Cossack, especially since his freedom and his lordly manners betrayed no low descent.

Approaching Pan Longin, he listened to the story of his ancestor Stoveiko and the cutting off of the three heads. He turned to the lieutenant, and said with perfect indifference, just as if nothing had happened between them, —

"You are on your way from the Crimea, I hear."

"From the Crimea," answered the lieutenant, dryly.

"I have been there too, though I did not go to Baktche Serai; but I think I shall be there if the favorable news we hear comes true."

"Of what news are you speaking?"

"It is said that if the king opens war against the Turks, Prince Vishnyevetski will visit the Crimea with fire and sword. This report brings great joy through the whole Ukraine and the lower country, for if under such a leader we do not frolic in Baktche Serai, then under none."

"We will frolic, as God is in heaven!" cried the young princes.

The respect with which Bogun spoke of the prince captivated the lieutenant; so he smiled and said in a more friendly voice, —

"I see that you are not satisfied yet with the expeditions which you have had with men of the lower country, which however have covered you with glory."

"Small war, small glory! Konashevich Sahaidachni did not win it on boats, but in Khotim."

At that moment a door opened, and Vassily, the eldest of the Kurtsevichi, came slowly into the room, led by Helena. He was a man of ripe years, pale and emaciated, with a sad ascetic countenance, recalling the Byzantine pictures of saints. His long hair, prematurely gray from misfortune and pain, came down to his shoulders, and instead of his eyes were two red depressions. In his hand he held a bronze cross, with which he began to bless the room and all present.

"In the name of God the Father, in the name of the Saviour and of the Holy Most Pure," said he, "if you are apostles and bring good tidings, be welcome on Christian thresholds!"

"Be indulgent, gentlemen," muttered the princess; "his mind is disturbed."

But Vassily continued to bless them with the cross, and added: "As it is said in the 'Dialogues of the Apostles,' 'Whoso sheds his blood for the faith will be saved; he who dies for gain or booty will be damned.' Let us pray! Woe to you, brothers, woe to me, since we made war for booty! God be merciful to us, sinners! God be merciful! And you, men who have come from afar, what tidings do you bring? Are you apostles?"

He was silent, and appeared to wait for an answer; therefore the lieutenant replied, —

"We are far from such a lofty mission. We are only soldiers ready to lay down our lives for the faith."

"Then you will be saved," said the blind man; "but for us the hour of liberation has not come. Woe to you, brothers! woe to me!"

He uttered the last words almost with a groan, and such deep despair was depicted on his countenance that the guests were at a loss what to do. Helena seated him straightway on a chair, and hastening to the anteroom, returned in a moment with a lute in her hand.

Low sounds were heard in the apartment, and the princess began to sing a hymn as accompaniment, —

"By night and by day I call thee, O Lord!
Relieve thou my torment, and dry my sad tears;
Be a merciful Father to me in my sins;
Oh, hear thou my cry!"

The blind man threw his head back and listened to the words of the song, which appeared to act as a healing balm, for the pain and terror disappeared by degrees from his face. At last his head fell upon his bosom, and he remained as if half asleep and half benumbed.

"If the singing is continued, he will become altogether pacified. You see, gentlemen, his insanity consists in this, that he is always waiting for apostles; and if visitors appear, he comes out immediately to ask if they are apostles."

Helena continued: —

"Show me the way, O Lord above Lords!
I'm like one astray in a waste without end,
Or a ship in the waves of a measureless sea,
Lost and alone."

Her sweet voice grew louder and louder. With the lute in her hands, and eyes raised to heaven, she was so beautiful that the lieutenant could not take his eyes from her. He looked, was lost in her, and forgot the world. He was roused from his ecstasy only by the words of the old princess, —

"That's enough! He will not wake soon. But now I request you to supper, gentlemen."

"We beg you to our bread and salt," said the young princes after their mother.

Pan Rozvan, as a man of polished manners, gave his arm to the lady of the house. Seeing this, Skshetuski hurried to the Princess Helena. His heart grew soft within him when he felt her hand on his arm, till fire flashed in his eyes, and he said, —

"The angels in heaven do not sing more beautifully than you."

"It is a sin for you to compare my singing to that of angels," answered Helena.

"I don't know whether I sin or not; but one thing is sure, — I would give my eyes to hear your singing till death. But what do I say? If blind, I could have no sight of you, which would be the same as torture beyond endurance."

"Don't say that, for you will leave here to-morrow, and to-morrow forget me."

"That will not be. My love is such that to the end of life I can love no one else."

The face of the princess grew scarlet; her breast began to heave. She wished to answer, but her lips merely trembled. Then Pan Yan continued, —

"But you will forget me in the presence of that handsome Cossack, who will accompany your singing on a balalaika."

"Never, never!" whispered the maiden. "But beware of him; he is a terrible man."

"What is one Cossack to me? Even if the whole Saitch were behind him, I should dare everything for your sake. You are for me like a jewel without price, — you are my world. But tell me, have you the same feeling for me?"

A low "Yes" sounded like music of paradise in the ears of Pan Yan, and that moment it seemed to him as if ten hearts, at least, were beating in his breast; in his eyes all things grew bright, as if a ray of sunlight had come to the

world; he felt an unknown power within himself, as if he had wings on his shoulders.

During supper Bogun's face, which was greatly changed and pale, glared several times. The lieutenant, however, possessing the affection of Helena, cared not for his rival. "The devil take him!" thought he. "Let him not get in my way; if he does, I'll rub him out."

But his mind was not on Bogun. He felt Helena sitting so near that he almost touched her shoulder with his own; he saw the blush which never left her face, from which warmth went forth; he saw her swelling bosom, and her eyes, now drooping and covered with their lids, now flashing like a pair of stars, — for Helena, though cowed by the old princess and living in orphanhood, sadness, and fear, was still of the Ukraine and hot-blooded. The moment a warm ray of love fell on her she bloomed like a flower, and was roused at once to new and unknown life. Happiness with courage gleamed in her eyes, and those impulses struggling with her maiden timidity painted her face with the beautiful colors of the rose.

Pan Yan was almost beside himself. He drank deeply, but the mead had no effect on him; he was already drunk from love. He saw no one at the table save her who sat at his side. He saw not how Bogun grew paler each moment, and, touching the hilt of his dagger, gave no ear to Pan Longin, who for the third time told of his ancestor Stoveiko, nor to Kurtsevich, who told about his expedition for "Turkish goods."

All drank except Bogun; and the best example was given by the old princess, who raised a goblet, now to the health of her guests, now to the health of Vishnyevetski, now to the health of the hospodar Lupul. There was talk, too, of blind Vassily and his former knightly deeds, of his unlucky campaign and his present insanity, which Simeon, the eldest, explained as follows: —

"Just think! the smallest bit of anything in the eye prevents sight; why should not great drops of pitch reaching the brain cause madness?"

"Oh, it is a very delicate organ," said Pan Longin.

At this moment the old princess noticed the changed face of Bogun.

"What is the matter, my falcon?"

"My soul is suffering, mother," said he, gloomily; "but a Cossack word is not smoke. I will endure."

"Hold out, my son; there will be a feast."

Supper came to an end, but mead was poured into the goblets unsparingly. Cossacks called to the dance came, therefore, with greater readiness. The balalaikas and drums, to which the drowsy attendants were to dance, began to sound. Later on, the young princes dropped into the prisyardka. The old princess, putting her hands on her sides, began to keep time with her foot and hum. Pan Yan, seeing this, took Helena to the dance. When he embraced her with his arm it seemed to him that he was drawing part of heaven toward his breast. In the whirl of the dance her long tresses swept around his neck, as if she wished to bind him to herself forever. He did not restrain himself; and when he saw that no one was looking, he bent and kissed her lips with all his might.

Late at night, when alone with Longin in their sleeping-room, the lieutenant, instead of going to rest, sat on the wooden bedstead and began: "You will go to Lubni to-morrow with another man."

Podbipienta, who had just finished his prayers, opened wide his eyes and asked: "How is that? Are you going to stay here?"

"I shall not stay, but my heart will remain, and only the *dulcis recordatio* will go with me. You see in me a great change, since from tender desires I am scarcely able to listen to a thing."

"Then you have fallen in love with the princess?"

"Nothing else, as true as I am alive before you. Sleep flees from my lids, and I want nothing but sighs, from which I am ready to vanish into vapor. I tell you this, because, having a tender heart famishing for love, you will easily understand my torture."

Pan Longin began to sigh, in token that he understood the torments of love, and after a time he inquired mournfully: "Maybe you have also made a vow of celibacy?"

"Your inquiry is pointless, for if all made such vows the *genus humanum* would soon be at an end."

The entrance of a servant interrupted further conversation. It was an old Tartar, with quick black eyes and a face as wrinkled as a dried apple. After he came in he cast a significant look at Pan Yan and asked,—

"Don't you wish for something? Perhaps a cup of mead before going to bed?"

"No, 't is not necessary."

The Tartar approached Skshetuski and muttered: "I have a word from the young princess for you."

"Then be my gift-giver! You may speak before this knight, for he knows everything."

The Tartar took a ribbon from his sleeve, saying, "The lady has sent you this scarf, with a message that she loves you with her whole soul."

The lieutenant seized the scarf, kissed it with ecstasy, and pressed it to his bosom. After he had become calmer, he asked: "What did the princess tell you to say?"

"That she loved you with her whole soul."

"Here is a thaler for your message. She said, then, that she loved me?"

"Yes."

"Here is another thaler for you. May God bless her, for she is most dear to me. Tell her, too— But wait, I'll write to her. Bring me ink, pen, and paper."

"What?" asked the Tartar.

"Ink, pen, and paper."

"We have none in the house. In the time of Prince Vassily we had, and afterward when the young princes learned to write from the monk; but that is a long time ago."

Pan Yan clasped his hands. "Have n't you ink and pen?" asked he of Podbipienta.

The Lithuanian opened his hands and raised his eyes to heaven.

"Well, plague take it!" said the lieutenant; "what can I do?"

The Tartar had squatted before the fire. "What is the use of writing?" said he, gathering up the coals. "The young lady has gone to sleep. And what you would write to her now, you can tell her in the morning."

"In that case I need no ink. You are a faithful servant to the young lady, as I see. Here is a third thaler for you. Are you long in her service?"

"It is now fourteen years since Prince Vassily took me captive, and since that time I have served faithfully. The night he went away through losing his name he left his little child to Constantine, and said to me: 'You will not desert the little girl, and you will be as careful of her as the eye in your head.'"

"Are you doing what he told you?"

"Yes, I am; I will care for her."

"Tell me what you see. How is she living here?"

"They have evil designs against her, for they wish to give her to Bogun, and he is a cursed dog."

"Oh, nothing will come of that! A man will be found to take her part."

"Yes!" said the old man, pushing the glowing coals. "They want to give her to Bogun, to take and bear her away as a wolf bears a lamb, and leave them in Rozlogi; for Rozlogi is not theirs, but hers from her father, Prince Vassily. Bogun is willing to do this, for he has more gold and silver in the reeds than there is sand in Rozlogi; but she holds him in hatred from the time he brained a man before her face. Blood has fallen between them, and hatred has sprung up. God is one!"

The lieutenant was unable to sleep that night. He paced the apartment, gazed at the moon, and had many thoughts on his mind. He penetrated the game of the Bulygi. If a nobleman of the vicinity were to marry the princess, he would remember Rozlogi, and justly, for it belonged to her; and he might demand also an account of the guardianship. Therefore the Bulygi, already turned Cossacks, decided to give the young woman to a Cossack. While thinking of this, Skshetuski clinched his fists and sought the sword at his side. He resolved to baffle these plots, and felt that he had the power to do so. Besides, the guardianship of Helena belonged to Prince Yeremi,—first, because Rozlogi was given by the Vishnyevetskis to old Vassily; secondly, because Vassily himself wrote a letter to the prince from Bar, requesting this guardianship. The pressure of public business alone—wars and great undertakings—could have prevented the prince from looking into the guardianship. But it would be sufficient to remind him with a word, and he would have justice done.

The gray of dawn was appearing when Skshetuski threw himself on the bed. He slept soundly, and in the morning woke with a finished plan. He and Pan Longin dressed in haste, all the more since the wagons were ready and the soldiers on horseback waiting to start. He breakfasted in the reception-room with the young princes and their mother, but Bogun was not there; it was unknown whether he was sleeping yet or had gone.

After he had refreshed himself Skshetuski said: "Worthy princess! time flies, and we must be on horseback in a moment; but before we thank you with grateful

hearts for your entertainment, I have an important affair on which I should like to say a few words to you and your sons apart."

Astonishment was visible on the face of the princess. She looked at her sons, at the envoy, and Pan Longin, as if trying to divine from their faces what the question might be; and with a certain alarm in her voice she said: "I am at your service."

The envoy wished to retire, but she did not permit him. They went at once to the room which was hung with armor and weapons. The young princes took their places in a row behind their mother, who, standing opposite Skshetuski, asked: "Of what affair do you wish to speak, sir?"

The lieutenant fastened a quick and indeed severe glance on her, and said: "Pardon me, Princess, and you, young Princes, that I act contrary to custom, and instead of speaking through ambassadors of distinction, I am the advocate in my own cause. But it cannot be otherwise; and since no man can battle with necessity, I present my humble request to you as guardians to be pleased to give me Princess Helena as wife."

If at that moment of the winter season lightning had descended in front of the house at Rozlogi, it would have caused less astonishment to the princess and her sons than those words of the lieutenant. For a time they looked with amazement on the speaker, who stood before them erect, calm, and wonderfully proud, as if he intended not to ask, but to command; and they could not find a word of answer, but instead, the princess began to ask,—

"How is this? Are you speaking of Helena?"

"I am, Princess, and you hear my fixed resolve."

A moment of silence followed.

"I am waiting for your answer, Princess."

"Forgive me, sir," said she, coughing; and her voice became dry and sharp. "The proposal of such a knight is no small honor for us; but nothing can come of it, since I have already promised Helena to another."

"But be pleased to consider, as a careful guardian, whether that promise was not made against the will of the princess, and if I am not better than he to whom you have promised her."

"Well, sir, it is for me to judge who is better. You may be the best of men; but that is nothing to us, for we do not know you."

The lieutenant straightened himself still more proudly, and his glances, though cold, became sharp as knives.

"But I know you, you traitors!" he burst forth. "You wish to give your relative to a peasant, on condition that he leaves you property unjustly acquired."

"You are a traitor yourself!" shouted the princess. "Is this your return for hospitality? Is this the gratitude you cherish in your heart? Oh, serpent! What kind of person are you? Whence have you come?"

The fingers of the young princes began to quiver, and they looked along the walls for weapons; but the lieutenant cried out, —

"Wretches! you have seized the property of an orphan, but to no purpose. In a day from now Vishnyevetski will know of this."

At these words the princess rushed to the end of the room, and seizing a dart, went up to the lieutenant. The young men also, having seized each what he could lay hands on, — one a sabre, another a knife, — stood in a half-circle near him, panting like a pack of mad wolves.

"You will go to the prince, will you?" shouted the old woman; "and are you sure that you will go out of here alive, and that this is not your last hour?"

Skshetuski crossed his arms on his breast, and did not wink an eye.

"I am on my way from the Crimea," said he, "as an envoy of Prince Yermi. Let a single drop of my blood fall here, and in three days the ashes of this house will have vanished, and you will rot in the dungeons of Lubni. Is there power in the world to save you? Do not threaten, for I am not afraid of you."

"We may perish, but you will perish first."

"Then strike! Here is my breast."

The princes, with their mother near them, held weapons pointed at the breast of the lieutenant; but it seemed as if invisible fetters held their hands. Panting, and gnashing their teeth, they struggled in vain rage, but none of them struck a blow. The terrible name of Vishnyevetski deprived them of strength. The lieutenant was master of the position.

The weak rage of the princess was poured out in a mere torrent of abuse: "Trickster! beggar! you want princely blood. But in vain; we will give her to any one, but not to you. The prince cannot make us do that."

Skshetuski answered: "This is no time for me to speak of my nobility. I think, however, that your rank might well bear the sword and shield behind mine. But for that matter, since a peasant was good in your eyes, I am better. As to my fortune, that too may be compared with yours; and since you say that you will not give me Helena, then listen to what I tell you: I will leave you in Rozlogi, and ask no account of guardianship."

"Do not give that which is not yours."

"I give nothing but my promise for the future. I give it, and strengthen it with my knightly word. Now choose, either to render account to the prince of your guardianship and leave Rozlogi, or give me Helena and you may keep the land."

The dart dropped slowly from the hand of the princess and after a moment fell on the floor with a rattle.

"Choose," repeated Skshetuski, — "either peace or war!"

"It is lucky," said she, more mildly, "that Bogun has gone out with the falcon, not wishing to look at you; for he had suspicions even yesterday. If he were here, we should not get on without bloodshed."

"I do not wear a sword, madam, to have my belt cut off."

"But think, is it polite on the part of such a knight as you, after entering a house by invitation, to force people in this way, and take a maiden by assault, as if from Turkish slavery?"

"It is right, since she was to be sold against her will to a peasant."

"Don't say that of Bogun, for though of unknown parentage, he is a famous warrior and a splendid knight; known to us from childhood, he is like a relative in the house. To take the maiden from him is the same as to stab him with a knife."

"Well, Princess, it is time for me to go. Pardon me, then, if I ask you once more to make your choice."

The princess turned to her sons. "Well, my sons, what do you say to such a humble request from this cavalier?"

The young men looked down, nudged each other with their elbows, and were silent. At last Simeon muttered: "If you tell us, mother, to slay him, we will slay; if you say give the girl, we will give her."

"To give is bad, and to slay is bad." Then turning to

Skshetuski, she said: "You have pushed us to the wall so closely that there is no escape. Bogun is a madman, ready for anything. Who will save us from his vengeance? He will perish himself through the prince, but he will destroy us first. What are we to do?"

"That is your affair."

The princess was silent for a time, then said: "Listen to me. All this must remain a secret. We will send Bogun to Pereyaslav, and will go ourselves with Helena to Lubni, and you will ask the prince to send us a guard at Rozlogi. Bogun has a hundred and fifty Cossacks in the neighborhood; part of them are here. You cannot take Helena immediately, for he would rescue her. It cannot be arranged otherwise. Go your way, therefore; tell the secret to no man, and wait for us."

"But won't you betray me?"

"If we only could; but we cannot, as you see yourself. Give your word that you will keep the secret."

"If I give it, will you give the girl?"

"Yes, for we are unable not to give her, though we are sorry for Bogun."

"Pshaw!" said the lieutenant, turning to the princes. "There are four of you, like oaks, and afraid of one Cossack, and you wish to overcome him by treason! Though I am obliged to thank you, still I say that it is not the thing for men of honor."

"Do not interfere in this," cried the princess. "It is not your affair. What can we do? How many soldiers have you against his hundred and fifty Cossacks? Will you protect us? Will you protect Helena herself, whom he is ready to bear away by force? This is not your affair. Go your way to Lubni. How we must act is for us to judge, if we only bring Helena to you."

"Do what you like; but one thing I repeat: If any wrong comes to Helena, woe to you!"

"Do not treat us in this fashion, you might drive us to desperation."

"You wished to bend her to your will, and now, when selling her for Rozlogi, it has never entered your heads to ask whether my person is pleasing to her."

"We are going to ask her in your presence," said the princess, suppressing the rage which began to seethe up again in her breast, for she felt clearly the contempt in these words of Skshetuski.

Simeon went for Helena, and soon entered the room with her. Amidst the rage and threats which still seemed to quiver in the air like the echoes of a tempest that has passed, amidst those frowning brows, angry looks, and threatening scowls, her beautiful face shone like the sun after a storm.

"Well, young lady!" said the princess sullenly, pointing to Pan Yan; "if you choose this man, he is your future husband."

Helena grew pale, and with a sudden cry covered her eyes with her two hands; then suddenly stretched them toward Skshetuski.

"Is this true?" whispered she, in transport.

An hour later the retinue of the envoy and the lieutenant moved slowly along the forest road toward Lubni. Skshetuski with Pan Longin Podbipienta rode in front; after them came the wagons of the envoy in a long line. The lieutenant was completely sunk in thought and longing, when suddenly he was roused from his pensiveness by the words of the song, —

"I grieve, I grieve, my heart is sore."

In the depth of the forest appeared Bogun on a narrow path trodden out by the peasants. His horse was covered with foam and mud. Apparently the Cossack, according to habit, had gone out to the steppes and the forest to dissipate with the wind, destroy, and forget in the distance that which over-pained his heart. He was returning then to Rozlogi.

Looking on that splendid, genuine knightly form, which only flashed up before him and vanished, Skshetuski murmured involuntarily, —

"It is lucky in every case that he brained a man in her presence."

All at once an undefined sorrow pressed his heart. He was sorry as it were for Bogun, but still more sorry that having bound himself by word to the princess, he was unable that moment to urge his horse after him and say, —

"We love the same woman; there is one of us, therefore, who cannot live in the world. Draw your sword. Cossack!"